

Bedford at home for the winners

A HOME tie with Bedford — that's the prospect for Wycombe Wanderers if they can overcome Croydon in tonight's replay at Loakes Park. And if they do get through, they can expect another hard fight from the Southern League men.

Bedford won promotion last season from Division One North and are currently sixth in the Premier Division. Their playing record reads: P13 W4 D5 L4 GA 18 GF21. Five draws and four defeats may not seem too impressive but Bedford reached the semi-finals of the F.A. Trophy last season which is no mean feat.

This year's run in the F.A. Cup also makes interesting reading. They beat Ely City 2-0 in the first qualifying round and then hammered Bourne of Lincolnshire 5-1 away. They were again away in the third qualifying round and ended Stamford's long unbeaten home record by winning 2-0.

To reach the first round, they had to overcome Lowestoft at home on Saturday from the Eastern Counties League. Lowestoft had a useful record this season but they were mercilessly thrashed 6-1 and that after one of the Bedford players had to leave the field injured.

That sort of form in the Cup will make Bedford a formidable side to beat for the replay winners.

Bedford's league form, as their record suggests, is a little inconsistent. They started well enough but two heavy defeats in the space of four days set them back on their heels for a time. They lost 5-1 at Dunstable and 3-1 at Chelmsford. In their match against leaders Wimbledon, Bedford went down 1-0 at home.

The man mainly responsible for Bedford's revival over the last three years is manager Jim Walker, who was trainer at Peterborough United, for several years. He took over when the club were bottom of Division One and steered them to promotion and a good run in the Trophy.

Walker has banked on experience to improve the team. Almost half his players were formerly with Northampton Town in Division Four of the Football League.

Goalkeeper Ray Peacock is something of a veteran. Aged 33, he played in all 72 matches for the club last season and let in just 33 goals. Another player in the veteran stage of his career is full back Dave Skinn. He has been with them for 13 seasons and has made over 500 appearances.

Bobby Folds is a former Northampton and Gillingham defender while Norman Cooley, a local player, was the man injured against Lowestoft. He could miss the first round.

Trevor Gould, brother of West Ham's Bobby, is the club's penalty taker and has not missed from the spot in three years — one less than Tony Horseman!

But the man everyone at Bedford are talking about is 21 year old, striker Gary Sargent. He has been knocking in goals, left, right and centre for the club. Last year he had 28 to his name and this term, he has already hit the target 20 times in league, cup

and friendly matches.

That's not all. Sargent has notched no less than three hat-tricks this season, including one against Lowestoft on Saturday. Offers have come from Millwall, Port Vale, Blackburn, Norwich and Fulham but, hardly surprisingly, Bedford are keen to hang on to his talents and the player himself is happy to stay at the club.

Bedford also have two former England Youth internationals in their ranks — Jim Campbell and Dave Parratt. Peter Hawkins is an ex-Welsh under 23 cap.

Playing a 4-3-3 formation, Bedford have fielded the same

back four all season but changes have been made in midfield and up front. One player known to Wycombe fans is Leo Markham. He is currently on a three month loan from Watford but has been unable to stamp a regular claim for first team football. Leo was formerly Marlow's top goalscorer before signing 'pro' forms for Watford. He had a friendly for Wanderers, too, at the start of the season.

It could be that Markham, who has been playing in the back four for Bedford at irregular intervals, may come in for the injured Cooley.

All in all Bedford look a strong side and any team that can reach the semi-finals of the FA Trophy, a notoriously difficult competition, must be treated with every respect.

If Wanderers do get through against Croydon they will revive many memories of the last meeting between these two clubs. It was at the same stage of the FA Cup in the 1966-67 season. The matches (see separate story) attracted a staggering total of 32,055 people over four games of tremendous cup football before Wycombe finally bowed out of the competition. Could history repeat itself?

That 1966 saga

SATURDAY'S FA Cup draw that paired Wycombe and Bedford, brought memories flooding back for many Wanderers fans. It was almost 10 years ago that the teams met in the same stage of the competition. Here's how the games went in an amazing saga.

FIRST ROUND: Wycombe 1, Bedford 1. Scorer: Keith Samuels. Attendance: 7,488.

1st REPLAY: Bedford 3, Wycombe 3. Scorers: Paul Bates, Tony Horseman, Les Merrick. Attendance: 7,641.

2nd REPLAY (at Loakes Park). Wycombe 1, Bedford 1. Scorer: Keith Samuels. Attendance: 8,821.

3rd REPLAY (at Bedford). Bedford 3, Wycombe 2. Scorers: Tony Horseman (2). Attendance: 8,105.

F.A. CUP



SPOTLIGHT